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VESTIGE OF THE THIRD FORCE

Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831), Poet, Anti-Skeptic, Millenarian¹

One of the unfortunate consequences of Babel is that only the Dutch read Dutch poetry. English-speaking historians may have heard of the seventeenth-century poet Joost van den Vondel, who generally qualifies as the greatest literary artist of the Netherlands. But virtually no one outside Holland knows Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831), poet, jurist, man of learning. Robert Southey, having met the poet at his home in Leiden in 1825, several years later lamented the fact that Bilderdijk's fame had not traversed national boundaries:

“‘And who is Bilderdijk?’ methinks thou sayest:

A ready question; yet which, trust me, Allan,

Would not be asked, had not the curse that came

From Babel, clipt the wings of Poetry.”²

When Southey sojourned in the Netherlands, Bilderdijk had already established his reputation as one of the few unconventional figures in Dutch history, comparable, in this sense, to Coornhert and Spinoza. The most outstanding poet of his age, he dominated nineteenth-century Dutch literature through his versatility, rhetorical prowess and sheer output. He is reputed to have written 300,000 lines of verse, not counting his unpublished poems. He practiced virtually all literary genres, from Pindaric odes and erotic rhyme to didactic poetry. Versed in the classics, he wrote numerous translations of, among many others, Homer, Sophocles, Anacreon, Callimachus, Horace, and Ovid. Bilderdijk was a prolific writer of essays on subjects ranging from moral philosophy, epistemology and natural law to aesthetics, architecture and botany. He translated theological and devotional works, including Thomas Chalmers's *Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation*, Chrysostome's sermons, and books on freemasonry and pneumatology. Besides contributing to perspective drawing, he wrote the first geological study in Dutch. His *History of the Fatherland* appeared posthumously in thirteen volumes. He himself regarded his linguistic studies and literary essays as his main achievement. Bilderdijk filled thousands of pages with his idiosyncratic views on the gender of nouns, the alphabet, grammar, spelling, medieval manuscripts, tragedy, and drama in general.

Not surprisingly, Bilderdijk's varied interests and comprehensive mind have led to different interpretations of his thought. Most are one of two kinds. Writers subscribing to the first interpretation regard him as a somewhat strange but devout apologist for Calvinist orthodoxy. They stress the fact that Bilderdijk was the only intellectual who, in the midst of the soul-destroying rationalism propounded by a complacent liberal establishment, dared to cry out against Revolution and Enlightenment, thus revivifying the religious heart of the nation.³ Those who follow the second

interpretation emphasize the Romantic nature of his thought. This group tends to look upon Bilderdijk as the only true Dutch Romantic, a Wordsworth and Coleridge combined, a metaphysical if rather erratic genius who outgrew the intellectual marshlands of his native country. Writers in this tradition stress his definition of poetry as a spontaneous overflow of feeling, his linguistic achievements, his preoccupation with geology, and his visionary view of Dutch history.⁴ One major interpreter, commenting on Bilderdijk's "real position as a philosopher," has stated that "to me there can be no doubt that Bilderdijk should be placed among the post-Kantian idealists like Fichte and Schelling (cf., again, Coleridge!)."⁵

Such statements are largely products of wishful thinking. Bilderdijk was not a devout Calvinist. He hardly ever went to church, his theology exhibits suspiciously heterodox leanings, and his professed adherence to the doctrine of predestination had less to do with a profound knowledge of the articles of Dort than mystical resignation. Similarly, the depiction of Bilderdijk as a post-Kantian idealist is sympathetic but lacks any evidence. Some literary historians have tried to salvage the "Romantic" nature of his poetry, but the result is not particularly convincing.⁶

"And who is Bilderdijk," to echo Southey, if neither a Calvinist nor a Romantic? How to interpret his thought? What to do with a man whose ideas have been qualified by friend and foe as fantastic or irrelevant at worst, and idiosyncratic at best? Bilderdijk has suffered the fate of those thinkers who have been excluded from the canons of "modernity," Rationalism, Empiricism, Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Liberalism. Recent scholarship has tended to rescue such thinkers from oblivion or misrepresentation. Thus Richard H. Popkin has made a point of studying early modern thinkers from the perspective of a "Third Force." Popkin characterizes the Third Force as a fertile mixture of Jewish, millenarian, and anti-skeptical thought that waxed outside the academic world but often had a profound influence on the development of thinkers like Spinoza and Newton, and later Priestley and Blake.⁷ This paper argues that if Bilderdijk can be categorized at all, it is within the confines of the Third Force. He typically combined empirical and rationalist notions with theosophy and millenarianism. The fact that Bilderdijk was a very late representative in this tradition explains why he was misunderstood or dismissed even in his own time. The German linguist Jakob Grimm, one of his correspondents, characteristically commented with polite detachment on his colleague's "Grundideen, die ich für falsch halte."⁸ In the following I shall outline Bilderdijk's anti-skeptical and millenarian ideas and subsequently focus on the eclectic combination of Augustinian, theosophical, and classical Roman notions that characterizes his thought. Finally, I shall comment briefly on Bilderdijk's status as a Third Force thinker rather than a Romantic. First, however, I shall offer a short sketch of his life.

Bilderdijk believed that to suffer was his personal destiny.⁹ He was a melancholic with a notoriously difficult character and few friends. As a result of a childhood accident he had had to keep inside and

was consequently raised in the solitude of his father's library. A precocious lad, he spent most of his time reading, writing and drawing. When he was 18 years of age he established his name as a writer by winning a gold medal for a lengthy didactic poem on the influence of poetry on government. He won several other awards in these early years, including one for an essay on the relationship between poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy. After reading law at Leiden, he became a solicitor at The Hague in 1782. The 1780s are known in Dutch history as the *Patriottentijd*, a period of political unrest and revolution inspired by democratic republican thought. Bilderdijk, a conservative defender of Orange and the stadtholderate, abhorred the democratic "Patriots." In addition, his marriage to Catharina Woesthoven was as obligatory (she was well into her pregnancy at the wedding) as it was disastrous. Unhappy at home, burdened with financial debts on account of his spendthrift, and disappointed in his efforts to obtain a position within the Orangist regime, Bilderdijk gradually evolved from an Enlightened stoic into a Christian theosophist, and began to flail the world with critical, uncompromising poetry. In 1795, when the Batavian Republic had been founded with French support, he refused to take the obligatory oath of allegiance. He was banished from the Netherlands, leaving his wife and children behind, and lived alternately in England and Germany. In London he became acquainted with Katharina Schweickhardt, the eighteen-year-old daughter of a Dutch painter. He fell madly in love, expressing his feelings in Italian love-letters and Dutch imitations of Tibullus in so passionate a manner that the object of his affection ultimately succumbed. They managed to leave London under a pretext and traveled to Germany. They lived together in Brunswick, plagued by poverty and the loss of one infant after another.

In Brunswick Bilderdijk earned his keep as a tutor to the children of the many refugees from French supremacy who settled there. He claimed, in one of his advertisements, to be able to offer lessons on logic, metaphysics, mathematics (including geometry and surveying), accounting, medicine (ranging from anatomy to pathology), psychology, mechanics, astronomy, geography, chemistry, ethics, theology, law (natural, public, Roman, etc.), aesthetics, rhetoric, poetry and literature, calligraphy, drawing, painting, architecture, antiquities, history, diplomacy, heraldry, the art of war, grammar, and, of course, Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Persian and *all* modern languages. At the same time, Bilderdijk wrote vast amounts of verse in uncontrollable bursts of poetic fervor, sedating himself with opium when physical pain took the place of inspiration. In 1806, he returned to the Netherlands. Again he was disappointed and embittered, since he never attained the professorship to which he so ardently aspired. He initially lived on grants given to him by self-appointed guardians and by Louis Napoleon, who then ruled the Netherlands; but in 1813 Bilderdijk exchanged French patronage for that of King William I of Orange. He continued to write poetry, attacking his compatriots in vitriolic satires and denouncing at every occasion any idea that smacked even slightly of progress, optimism, Enlightenment, and democracy. In private lessons at his home he set forth his controversial historical views to a number of young intellectuals – to the chagrin of the Leiden Academy, which did not

appreciate the corruption of students by a man who by now was famed for his opposition to everything the liberal Protestant establishment held in esteem. In his later years, Bilderdijk befriended Isaac da Costa (1798-1860), the highly intelligent and gifted scion of an old Jewish family, who caused further turmoil by formally converting to Christianity in 1822.

Bilderdijk's poetic abilities were declining when Southey met him in 1825. By then he was milking the success of his major achievements, including a reworking of Pope's *Essay on Man* (1804), the complete Ossian, a number of never-to-be-performed tragedies, and long but accomplished didactic poems on the *morbis eruditorum* (1807), the spiritual world (1811) and the angelic realm (1817), to name but a few. An unfinished epic poem, *The Decline of the Primal World*, written in 1810 and portraying the period between the Fall and the Deluge, is generally regarded as his *magnum opus*. On the day he died, in Haarlem in 1831, thunder and lightning is purported to have struck the town. Even before his death Bilderdijk had become a myth, venerated by his followers, reviled by his opponents.

The otherwise so well organized Dutch have never found it easy to classify a man who careered so irregularly through a life fraught with poetry and polemic. It is a pity, perhaps, to attempt to classify such a thinker. Yet to position him historically is to understand him better, and for this purpose at least two strands in his thought must be given due attention. The first strand is his anti-skepticism. Bilderdijk's development in this regard is closely connected with his personal biography. He began his intellectual career as an adherent to the philosophy of Christian Wolff, one of the patriarchs of the German Enlightenment. Bilderdijk embroidered on the general stoic-epicurean outlook he derived from his broad reading by studying classical writings, especially Strabo's *Geographia* and Cicero's *De officiis*. His didactic poems on the influence of poetry on government (1775), true patriotism (1776) and the founding fathers of the Dutch Republic (1781) also reflect what in German historiography is often called "popular philosophy," which reached him above all via Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) and Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813).¹⁰ Mainly concerned to point out that individual felicity is a consequence of the disciplined exercise of moral duties and a precondition to social harmony, Bilderdijk's early poems also demonstrate his familiarity with the refined aesthetics and anthropology of the *Popularphilosophen*. Particularly important to the ambitious young poet was the idea of glory. Like many of his contemporaries, he assumed that the mutual acclamation resulting from the pursuit of individual glory provided a basis for social unity.¹¹ In later years Bilderdijk rejected these Enlightened stoical notions out of hand, looking upon his flirtation with Cicero and Wolff as a youthful blemish on his personal motto, *Semper Idem*. Yet he was never able to distance himself from at least one stoical idea. This was the idea of *autarkeia*, of impassive self-sufficiency, which he soon found to be at odds with his attempts, as a solicitor, poet, and man of letters, to achieve distinction through public approval.

Enlightened popular philosophy was not devoid of skeptical tendencies.¹² An optimistic view of human reason in relation to religious tradition and divine revelation was habitually juxtaposed with a dim view of what reason was actually capable of. Since it was next to impossible to understand the true essence of things, it behoved man to be humble, exercise moderation, and attempt to make a little progress through trial and experiment in the meantime. Bilderdijk, who was thoroughly imbued with such ideas, retained them later in life. For example, he would reject the German speculative *Naturphilosophie* which arose in the decades after 1800, and continue to subscribe instead to common eighteenth-century ideas on the need for empirical research in the natural sciences, and on the difficulties involved in bridging the gap between essence and appearance. He had imbibed these notions from, among others, the *Introductio ad philosophiam, metaphysicam et logicam* (1736) by the Dutch philosopher Willem Jacob 's Gravesande and the five-volume *Lettres philosophiques et morales sur l'histoire de la terre et de l'homme* (1779) by the Swiss naturalist Jean-André de Luc (whom he befriended in Germany). Nevertheless, by the second half of the 1780s Bilderdijk's moderate skepticism had undergone a fundamental change. He turned into a radical anti-skeptic with marked neo-Platonic and theosophical leanings. He began to spurn the human understanding, confining it to the shadowy world of false appearances, and appealed instead to a higher faculty which he variously called Reason (as opposed to the understanding, which was capable only of mere ratiocination), the Heart, or Feeling. This higher faculty had access to the real, spiritual world suffused by the Spirit of God.

It is difficult to trace Bilderdijk's intellectual development from a dutiful member of conventional poetry societies that advanced the good of the public, to a solitary Christian-theosophical convert who served only the divine Good. Not many letters from this period are extant and we chiefly have to make do with allusions in his poetry. We know that between 1783 and 1795 he went through periods of extreme disillusionment in his personal life. This disaffection resulted in attempts to Christianize his conception of stoic self-sufficiency through a reading of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and through translations into Dutch prose and poetry of Boethius's *De consolazione philosophia*, Solomon's Ecclesiastes, and Ibn Durayd's *Al-Maksura*. His personal philosophy became fatalistic to the extreme. Happiness, he now believed, was not achieved by freely performing one's duty to the benefit of the public, but by relinquishing one's will and acquiescing in the fate ordained by God. He combined this emphasis on *Gelassenheit* with an outright repudiation of the pursuit of glory and acclamation, in poetry (the patronage of the critics) as well as politics (the favour of the populace). Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, and so said Bilderdijk. There is no purpose at all to any of our human plans, aims, and ambitions. It is solely the order foreordained by God to which we must subject our misguided volitions and through which we can fulfill our destiny.

Apart from carefully developing this Salomonic unconcern for the fickleness of human existence, Bilderdijk began to read esoteric literature. It is not wholly clear which books this bibliographical

omnivore read in this particular period, apart from several writings by the Swedish visionary Emanuel Swedenborg.¹³ Later in life, around 1811, he would warmly recommend Johann Heinrich Jung Stilling's *Theorie der Geisterkunde* (1808), a book replete with Christian esoteric views. But by then Bilderdijk had already developed his own theosophical philosophy.¹⁴ The evidence we have for changes in his general worldview before 1800 is sporadic but telling nonetheless. In the 1790s, for instance, he began to dabble in astrology, particularly onomancy, the art of predicting the future through combinations of astrological data with the individual letters of one's Christian name.¹⁵ He possibly had contacts with the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*, a society with strong pietist leanings established to propagate orthodox Christianity. The founding father of this society, J.A. Urlsperger, had sympathized with Behmenism and Cabbalism. In later years Bilderdijk befriended a member of the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*, Hermann Daniel Hermes (1731-1807), a Lutheran theologian and reputed Rosicrucian who participated in the reactionary movement in Prussia after the death of Frederick II.¹⁶ Passivity and a preference for the *Imitation of Christ* characterized the Rosicrucian societies of the time, and it is possible that Bilderdijk became involved with German Rosicrucians in the wake of the Prussian army sent to restore law and order in the Netherlands in 1787 (at the behest of the new king, Frederick William II, whose own secret name was Ormesus Magnus). There is also a curious connection with Denmark, a country often identified with Cabbalism, magic, and absolutism.¹⁷ In 1792 Bilderdijk, who by then had renounced the stadtholderate, wrote a peculiar poem in praise of royal absolutism, which he dedicated to the feeble-minded King of Denmark, Christian VII. He was probably aware of the fact that in circles of the Danish elite reincarnation and metempsychosis enjoyed certain popularity. The well-known Swiss pietist Johann Kaspar Lavater traveled to Copenhagen in 1793, where he associated with Karl von Hessen-Kassel, the king's brother-in-law, who claimed to communicate regularly with the spiritual world. On his way back to Switzerland, Lavater met an itinerant Dutchman, Rijklof Michael van Goens (1748-1810), who confirmed these claims.¹⁸ Van Goens had befriended Bilderdijk in 1785 and had similarly converted to a Christian orthodoxy of sorts in these years, which he, like Bilderdijk, combined with an avid reading of Swedenborg.¹⁹

This evidence is circumstantial, and Bilderdijk's tendency to refer only obliquely to speculative matters does not help. He was ever afraid for blemishes on his reputation, aspiring as he did to a public career in diplomacy or scholarship. The first unambiguous indication of his conversion to the Third Force is provided by a letter to his sister-in-law, written in London in 1797. In this letter he put forward his views on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, with whose small flock of Dutch followers he was to some extent acquainted.²⁰ Kant, he believed, was a moderate Pyrrhonist.²¹ He acceded to Kant's claim that the understanding as such is unable to attain truth and considered this sceptical conclusion to be a praiseworthy contribution to philosophy. But Kant's negative conclusions had to be

supplemented with a positive metaphysics, and this, Bilderdijk observed, was one of the major discoveries he himself had made:

“To wit, that the principle of Truth is totally unlike that which we have until now supposed it to be. That we would be unsusceptible to Truth and knowledge, if we were isolated beings; if we had in ourselves no mirror of the universe, of God himself; if the seeds of knowledge were not contained within us; if the influences of the Supernatural world did not enlighten us; if there were no communication between the Spiritual beings and us, &c. &c.”²²

Bilderdijk was evidently not a Kantian.²³ By 1797, he had become a theosophical anti-skeptic, and would remain one until he died.

Bilderdijk set forth his anti-skeptical “system,” as he called it, in numerous tracts, poems, and a myriad snippets of paper on which he scribbled sudden intuitions, draft essays and passages from the books he read. He argued time and again that man was confined to a world of appearances on account of original sin. Time and space as we know it are unreal in the sense that they belong to the phenomenal world. In the true, spiritual world beyond our senses there is no time, no space, and no causality.²⁴ Ensnared in our sinful state, we can define the spiritual world only in terms of what we are not, as infinite, for example, or eternal. We ourselves are mere shadows in a nether world; in the spiritual world, on the other hand, there is positiveness, fullness, true being. Imprisoned in the grossness of the material world, but ever goaded by the divine spark in our hearts, we yearn to be immersed in the spiritual influences that emanate from the deity. This is possible through faith in Christ, who can release us from our condition of illusive independence and make us one with the divine. Individual inspiration is the only way to infallible certainty. Like the seventeenth-century representatives of the Third Force, Bilderdijk continuously distinguished between divine inspiration and the false enthusiasm (*dweperij*) resulting from imagination or melancholy.²⁵ He delved into Maimonides’s *Guide for the Perplexed* for an analysis of true prophecy. He also read Johann Baptista Van Helmont’s *Venatio scientiarum*, where *ratio* as *non-ens* is distinguished from *veritas* as *ens reale*. The understanding merely constructs a harmony between logical categories and the nature of the objects perceived by the senses; but this harmony is confused and does not reflect reality. Truth, claims Van Helmont, can be achieved only through illumination, through an epistemological process akin to prophetic vision and leading to knowledge of the true essence of things.²⁶ This was precisely the theory broached by Bilderdijk at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁷

But our links with the spiritual world are tenuous. Such connections are restricted to the momentary flashes of insight that enlarge our awareness, and are best expressed through poetry. Indeed, the act of writing poetry reflects this fleeting communion with the spiritual world, enabling true poets to touch divinity, penetrate into the secrets of nature, communicate with the dead, and foretell the future. The opening up of our inward faculty to the ethereal sphere brings about paroxysms of poetical fervor, as so many spontaneous overflows of feeling, each representing a brief

return to the state of paradisaical completion we once possessed.²⁸ Another, related method of entering the spiritual world, Bilderdijk claimed, was sexual intercourse. In a series of “Pindaric” or seemingly disorganized odes which reflect neo-Platonic, Cabbalistic and Swedenborgian ideas, he argued that true lovers, i.e. a man and a woman foreordained by God to be united in holy matrimony, bring their sexual commerce through the spiritual world as an offering to God. Their souls mingle until they are one, signifying a temporary restoration of the prelapsarian androgyne.²⁹

Bilderdijk’s theosophical brand of anti-skeptical philosophy is one aspect of the Third Force in his thought. The other is millenarianism. Though he vilified the ideas of Enlightened progress advocated by his contemporaries, Bilderdijk believed that the advancement of learning was part of the providential scheme. “I predict,” he wrote, “that a time will come in which a greater and deeper insight into Nature, into the nature of creation, generation, regeneration, and decomposition, will lead us in retrospect to see truths which now we comprehend only through faith.”³⁰ The inspired writers of the bible had access to truths we are as yet unable to fathom, and so for the time being we must simply accept them as true. This belief in progress Bilderdijk (who had a high opinion of Francis Bacon) shared with those who before him had evoked the Third Force, Comenius, More, Newton, and Swedenborg, or contemporaries like Blake and Coleridge. For the Dutch poet too the time had come in which more and more people would be illuminated by the divine light, and nature and Scripture understood more completely. This applied especially to the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelations according to John.

Bilderdijk’s belief in the coming of a millennial kingdom was perhaps even more idiosyncratic than that of his Third Force predecessors. Focusing especially on language and poetry, he transformed the aesthetics he had learnt from Mendelssohn. True poetry, wrote Bilderdijk, signals a return to pristine purity, but also heralds the millennium. Words are the heavenly vehicles through which man regains access to the spiritual world. The language of paradise had been poetry immaculate, a speech so pure and spiritual and so divine in origin that it conveyed upon the speaker the power to transform and create matter. Speech reflects will (“And God said, let it be”), and the divine will reflects true being; thus speech is a reflection of Being.³¹ After Babel, of course, the number of languages proliferated, and the paradisaical tongue with its miraculous properties had long since disappeared. It is important at this point to note that according to Bilderdijk the rate of corruption of the human race had increased rapidly after the Flood. Between the Fall and the Flood there had been a relative degree of purity, evidenced, among other things, by the fact that prediluvial man was substantially larger than man today. The passengers on Noah’s ark preserved the language spoken at that time for posterity, but then, of course, degeneration set in on an unprecedented scale. Bilderdijk nonetheless believed that it was possible, if not to recover, then at least to trace remnants of the language of paradise in the languages of the present. It was this idea which inspired him to devote a great many years of his life to

study Indo-European languages, and to construct in feverish anxiety the far-fetched etymologies that Grimm later rejected as false.³² It was an obsessive search for the divine speech that had once been bestowed upon Adam, the restoration of which offered the key to true knowledge.

The belief in the existence of primeval knowledge, *prisca sapientia*, had guided many scholars since the Renaissance, and its appeal in the eighteenth-century was still strong.³³ Indeed, one of the books that Bilderdijk read with delight was the two-volume *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (Edinburgh, 1748-1749), by a colorful Scot, the “Chevalier” Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686-1743), ex-Calvinist, Jacobite, freemason, deist – and patron of the arch-sceptic David Hume.³⁴ Ramsay’s book is replete with the *prisca sapientia* of ancient Hebrews, Chinese, Indians, Persians, and Egyptians, who in his view had possessed much knowledge concerning God, the Trinity, the Messiah, the Fall, and Paradise. Bilderdijk, however, considered primeval knowledge to have been preserved best in the north of Europe. He characteristically made his point obliquely by writing a science fiction story (1813) about a balloonist who inadvertently landed on the moon. There he discovered the sad remains of an ancient traveler, whom he was able to identify as Abaris, the Hyperborean mentioned in Plato’s *Charmides*.³⁵ The northerner Abaris, traveling southwards by balloon, was reputed to have first brought knowledge to the Greeks.³⁶ The civilization from whence Abaris came was clearly the link between the prediluvial world and the ancient civilizations of Greece and Egypt. Bilderdijk is not clear as to the precise historical developments in these early times, but he connects the Hyperboreans with two later peoples in particular, the Scottish and the Dutch.³⁷ Though he did not generally value foreign cultures highly, Bilderdijk had a very high opinion of the Scots. The fact that the Scots had intermingled with the English was the only reason why the latter were still able to beget comparatively handsome women with, as the poet had noticed in London, conspicuously big feet.³⁸ The Scots, like the Dutch, were brawny and well-built, for the unadulterated blood of the early Hyperboreans still flowed through their veins; and Gaelic, like Dutch, was an extraordinarily melodious language, because it had a strong genealogical bond with the language of paradise.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that Bilderdijk found it worthwhile to translate into rather tedious Dutch verse the whole of Macpherson’s *Ossian*. More important is the fact that he believed the original Dutch language of the early Middle Ages to represent the purest Indo-European variation of the lost *Ur*-speech. By stripping Dutch of its Latin and French corruptions, this language could become the medium through which pristine knowledge would be restored to humanity. “I can see the horizon / Brightening already / With a new, a Divine light!,” he sang in a poem in which he alluded to a northern renaissance: “Holland will rise again.”³⁹ Elsewhere he noted that traditional prophecies in Muslim and Christian cultures invariably suggested that the future universal monarchy would be established in Western Europe.⁴⁰ Moreover, in a poem written in 1809 he intimated that Holland was an exact antitype of Israel. The Messiah first sprang from the latter, and the reader is led to the conclusion that he will rise again among the former.⁴¹ Such speculations abound in the poetry

Bilderdijk wrote between 1809 and 1813, but he never relinquished his views. Holland, he observed in 1822, was intended by God to be a holy land. This is evident from the fact that the covering of the tabernacle is red (Ex. 26.14) and that red, in the bible, actually means orange (cf. Gen. 25.30, where Esau asks Jacob for some of his “red pottage” of lentils, although everyone knows that lentils are not red but orange). In other words, orange was designated in the divine scheme to fulfill a special purpose in the Kingdom of God. That is why the covering of the tent was orange, why Pelagianism was first condemned at a council in Orange in southern France, and why the Dutch House of Orange has always protected the Reformed church.⁴²

All this might lead one to question Bilderdijk’s sanity, or at least his significance in terms of the history of ideas. Yet he held a remarkably consistent philosophy of history. It exhibits a predilection for cycles – a case in point is the cycle from Holland as one of the preserves of ancient knowledge, through the democratic corruptions of the *Patriottentijd*, to Holland as the possible center of the universal monarchy. This philosophy of history has been interpreted as an original application to the history of the human race of Leibniz’s monadology. Different periods of time mirror each other, while each period mirrors the whole of history. The cycle of Holland thus reflects the fundamental biblical cycle of Paradise, Fall, and Redemption.⁴³ But this, it seems, is to make too much of Bilderdijk’s high esteem for Leibniz. It is not the philosophical attempt to develop a comprehensive model of cosmic harmony that connects Bilderdijk with Leibniz; the connection between the two is the Christianity and theosophy to which Leibniz himself was indebted.⁴⁴ Bilderdijk’s belief in monads was a direct consequence of theosophical notions stating that nothing is fortuitous and everything interconnected, that creation consists of signs that can be unraveled, and that the material world is a reflection of the spiritual realm. Such notions he found also, as many of his contemporaries did, in Swedenborg’s doctrine of correspondences.⁴⁵ This is why he valued the Leibnizian idea that all parts of creation mirror each other and that each part mirrors the whole. As early as 1797, he had put his theosophical view of history to his new mistress:

“Yes, my dear Angel, there is nothing in dreams, nor in the real events of life, but by its connexion in the whole chain of fortuitous chances (like it is arranged by providence) it is a portending sign and emblem of others: and every event in particular bears the emblem of the whole.”⁴⁶

This emblematic view of history crops up repeatedly in Bilderdijk’s writings, including his highly intricate and speculative analyses of biblical prophecy, which he mainly developed between 1813 and 1816. He noted, for instance, that in the vision of Dan. 8 a goat follows the ram with two horns. The ram clearly refers to Cyrus (“Kores,” says Bilderdijk, is derived from “kors,” which means horn) and the goat to Alexander the Great. This succession is mirrored later in history. The new Cyrus is Napoleon (the “kors”-ican), and who else can the second Alexander be but the Russian Tsar?

Bilderdijk’s account of the Apocalypse is interesting enough on account of its breathtaking inventiveness and the vast erudition supporting it – his sources range from the classical Sybilline and

rabbinic writings to Virgil, Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1690), and the contemporary English prophet Richard Brothers (1757-1824).⁴⁷ I will not, however, discuss his eschatology in detail. Suffice it to note that he was a chiliast in the proper sense of the word, who regarded Napoleon as a portent of the Antichrist and expected Christ to rule physically over his kingdom for a thousand years, a reign that would probably commence in either 1823 or 1848 and would be preceded by a return to Israel of the Lost Tribes. He also believed in a final restitution of all things, through which even the damned would share, albeit to a lesser degree than the truly blessed, in eternal beatitude.

Bilderdijk's anti-skeptical and millenarian ideas figure prominently in his thought, and although he was anything but a systematic philosopher, he did attempt to mould these and other ideas into a relatively uniform whole. Some interpreters have suggested that his thought reveals a single underlying principle,⁴⁸ but this is not the case. Bilderdijk was an eclectic who continuously added to his already astonishing repository of information by reading, in their entirety, and among many other things, Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique*, Des Maizeaux's edition of the *Scaligerana*, and many contemporary German and English journals. Many of the ideas he gathered and many of the unasked-for opinions he gave can be related, not to a single "principle," but to an intricate combination of three themes whose intellectual antecedents stem largely from the seventeenth century. These themes are respectively Augustinianism, theosophy, and the classical Roman tradition.

There was still much Augustinianism in eighteenth-century thought.⁴⁹ This applies also to the Dutch context, where orthodox Calvinism had been a current to be reckoned with ever since the sixteenth century. Bilderdijk, however, showed little interest in the traditional Calvinist authors of the Dutch Golden Age, much preferring writers like the Jansenist Blaise Pascal or the German pietist Johann Ludwig Ewald (1748-1822) instead. Hence my use of the term Augustinianism rather than Calvinism to describe his ideas on pride as the cause of sin, on regeneration as a change of heart through the infusion of divine grace, on man's fundamental disquietude, and on charity as a result of love for God. These Augustinian notions he predictably combined with certain mystical tendencies, which centered particularly on the ancient adage "know thyself" (self-knowledge implies knowledge of God)⁵⁰ and on the need for individual passivity. These mystical aspects are given additional force by his theosophy, including ideas on the divine spark in fallen man, illumination and intuitive knowledge, the angelic realm, *prisca sapientia*, the analogy or correspondence between the spiritual and material worlds, and the coarse materiality occasioned by the Fall. The third theme is classical Roman thought concerning *honor*, which Bilderdijk probably absorbed, not only by reading Cicero, but also by studying early modern theorists of French aristocracy: Montaigne, La Rochefoucault, La Bruyère, and others.⁵¹ This theme is connected with Bilderdijk's incessant cultivation of moral self-sufficiency, whether as a pedantic youthful stoic or a proud and independent Augustinian

controversialist. It is also linked with his political preference for a monarchy that derived its stability from a strong and responsible aristocracy, and his unconditional revulsion against the commercial and bourgeois traditions of the Dutch Republic.

In this paper, I can only provide a glimpse of the way Bilderdijk was able to more or less combine ideas of such disparate origins and nature. To do so I shall concentrate on the ontology to which he continuously returned. One ingredient of his ontological reasoning was provided by classical Roman philosophy.⁵² This ontology can be summarily described as follows. The permanent and the universal belong, not to our ephemeral and inconstant world, but to the “real,” natural world of unchanging essences. The classicist is particularly interested in these essences. They can be imitated in art, for example, or they can be studied through history; thus the Roman Empire, as a temporal manifestation of the essential world, can provide us with information on the structure of a normative political system. The natural world of essences is a hierarchical one. The relations that obtain in this world are always between things of a higher and things of a lower order. In the scale of essences, for instance, man is higher than the animal and the passions lower than reason. This difference is qualitative: higher things are better for they show a greater propensity towards the good. For this reason higher things should never be ruled over by lower things. To allow this to happen would revolutionize the natural order. However, it is not easy to be part of a higher order, and this is why most people belong to the lower. Those who belong to the higher order are properly speaking “human”; i.e. they pursue the true end of man as man. It is this group which emphasizes the need for *honor*, *virtus*, and *auctoritas*. The larger part of mankind, however, does not answer to the true end of man, and is generally corrupt and bestial. This is why there is an aristocracy and why authority is restricted to a limited group of persons. Bilderdijk compounded this classical ontology with a theosophical ontology. According to the latter, man is not only condemned to religious anxiety (this represents the Augustinian streak in Bilderdijk’s argument), but also to ontological deficiency. Only God has Being. Creation in itself is non-being; it has meaning only insofar as it derives being from Being. Bilderdijk’s thought in this regard resembles that of the mystic and theosophist Pierre Poiret, who had argued that everything not oriented towards God or the higher faculties is essentially inferior.⁵³ The Dutch poet made the same point, indicating the realm of divine emanation, the spiritual world and the human heart as spaces of essential superiority.

Bilderdijk’s fusing of two ontologies has remarkable consequences. A man derives his humanity from his state of continuous dependence on God. His ontological deficiency is, as it were, partly annulled. He therefore has more being, so that he belongs to a qualitatively higher, “nobler” order by virtue of his ascendancy to the spiritual world. The reverse is also true. Those who belong to a higher estate in the natural order have a greater disposition for piety, i.e. for canceling their ontological deficit by approaching true Being. It is not that Bilderdijk believed the lower social orders to be incapable of religious faith; he accepted the basic Christian principle that faith in Christ is accessible

to all, regardless of race, sex or social standing. But he did assume that being a male descendant from an old and virtuous lineage offered definite advantages in both a social and a religious sense. The moral aristocracy of ancient families was evidently a consequence of their belonging to a superior social order. The relative purity of their blood made them less susceptible to the ontological degeneration of the human race following the Fall. Hence Bilderdijk's interest in the racial superiority of the Scots and the Dutch, whose purity of blood, poetical language and penchant for (Calvinist) piety could be traced to their descent from the Hyperboreans. In the following, I will provide three other examples of this aristocratic theosophy, in order to make clear how Bilderdijk's blending of two ontologies provided for a measure of unity in his thought.

Firstly, Bilderdijk valued pious noblemen highly. He distinguished, for instance, between bravery (*dapperheid*), which is the mere ability to wield a sword, and courage (*moed*), which is a moral condition resulting from the will to triumph. To will, he argued, is to exercise power; but we can only will properly when our will directly reflects God's will. The submission of the human will to, and its merging with, the will of God explains how men were able to effect miracles in the New Testament.⁵⁴ This also explains why the willpower of the superior man of honor is the same as the willpower of the believer. Both reflect a state of superior being. Bilderdijk's sympathy for the proud militancy of medieval knights and for the crusades has often been associated with his "Romanticism." There may be some truth in this, but the point here is that only his fusion of the classical and theosophical ontologies clarifies his claim that "*Pious* [*vroom*] really means that which the Romans call *strenuus*, i.e. courageous."⁵⁵ Secondly, Bilderdijk, as was to be expected, traced his own lineage as far back as 713 to the knight Elius of Grail and Lady Heile, the daughter of the Hollandic knight Diederik van Teisterband – a line which, as he believed, linked him with the major dynasties of Europe. During his stay in Brunswick he used the name of "heer van Teisterband," which can mean "Mr. Van Teisterband" but also "the Lord of Teisterband." As the heir of an ancient and relatively unadulterated family of superior blood, it was only natural that he himself should be deeply involved, as a prophesying poet, in the coming of the millennium. Thirdly, Bilderdijk associated women with ontological inferiority. In contrast to the German *Naturphilosophen*, he held a preformist view of reproduction, arguing that the female body contains embryos that are so many miniature humans. These embryos hold the material principle of life, whereas the seed of the male possesses the spiritual or vital principle. This vital principle is identical to the soul, the breath of God, which in Bilderdijk's traducian theory is exclusively transferable to progeny via the father. The male body, in other words, contains that which makes man ontologically superior. It is the male who forms the bond between the perfection of paradise and the remnants of ontological supremacy still extant in certain clans and nations. Hence Bilderdijk's overwhelmingly patriarchal view of both familial and socio-political relations, as well as his high regard for classical Roman law. Characteristically, he viewed the famous

German historian August Ludwig Schlözer (1735-1809), who had argued that political authority originated in consensus rather than fatherhood, as a malicious donkey.

Many other examples could be given of Bilderdijk's double ontology. This is not to say that the three major themes in his thought – Augustinianism, theosophy, and classicism – were always so intricately connected. They surface repeatedly in his work, often independently and sometimes in conjunction, and generally demonstrate the breadth of his reading as well as the pan-European stature of his thought. His belief that selfhood is an illusion and that true identity is grounded in the spiritual world where there is no individuality, links him with both the theological response to Locke's theory of identity and the theosophists.⁵⁶ His assertion that there is only freedom in dependence, with regard to divine as well as political authority, connects him with Augustinianism, early-modern theories of divine right, and Restoration political thought – his political conservatism probably formed the intellectual basis of his friendship with Southey.⁵⁷ His contention that evil is a negation of the good has both neo-Platonic and Augustinian overtones. His retention of Cartesian vortices, since in his view the Newtonian gravitational force implies gross materialism, shows marked similarities with the ideas of the orthodox Anglican Hutchinsonians.⁵⁸ The same applies to his ether theory of light, by which he was able to explain phenomena ranging from the sexual union of souls and animal magnetism to the mechanics of poetical inspiration.⁵⁹ His esteem for Leibniz's monadology, Bonnet's preformism, and Lessing's literary criticism was closely associated with his penchant for German pietism.⁶⁰ His philosophy of language is reminiscent of Leibniz and the French theosophist Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803).⁶¹ Finally, his interest in second-hand Cabbalism and life-long sympathy for what he believed to be Trinitarian elements in Rabbinic thought make him an ambiguous advocate of the European Jewry.

Who, then, is Bilderdijk? Why include him in Popkin's Third Force? The Third Force is usually regarded as a set of ideas articulated by thinkers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Why not just label this nineteenth-century Dutchman a Romantic, or, barring that, a theosophical esoteric? Although there are substantial overlaps between these three phenomena – the Third Force, Romanticism, and theosophical esotericism – the case of Willem Bilderdijk may serve to show that it is nonetheless important to distinguish between them.

Many of Bilderdijk's peculiarities – his esteem for nobility, his aversion to technology, his philo-Catholicism, his penchant for apocalyptic visions, and so on – seem to reveal a Romantic temperament. My point is, however, that such traits were hardly exclusive to Romanticism. It would be strange indeed if it were not possible to single out "Romantic" elements in the thought of an erudite conservative and resourceful artist living in the Romantic Age. A case in point is Bilderdijk's pronounced interest in medieval manuscripts. At first glance, this seems to betray a Romantic fascination with the Christian past. As I have tried to show in this paper, however, Bilderdijk's focus

on the Middle Ages was motivated by his desire to demonstrate linguistic continuities in order to relearn the paradisaical speech and prepare the way for the millennium. He applied to the medieval period the refined philological and historical methods with which any Dutch scholar of his generation would have been familiar. Does this necessarily make him a Romantic? Bilderdijk tried to engage seriously with the ideas and theories of his time, but the way he did never quite fits in with conventional assumptions of what it means to be “Romantic”. A recent study has shown that Bilderdijk’s view of the imaginative faculty is entirely unlike the definitions used by the German and English Romantics, or, for that matter, by contemporary literary historians attempting to characterize Romanticism.⁶² Bilderdijk’s *History of the Fatherland* is utterly devoid of the evocative power usually associated with Romantic historiography. He focused on classical Roman rather than Greek civilization, and abhorred Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790), the only Dutch philosopher of the period who deeply influenced German Romanticism.⁶³ Bilderdijk’s drama was consciously modeled after the arch-classicists Racine and Corneille, his verse wholly based on classical rules and rhetoric. He was not particularly concerned with artistic authenticity or the oneness of man and nature. His elopement owed more to libido and circumstance than a desire to upset bourgeois etiquette, and he never intentionally cultivated his ego or defied God. Rather than being motivated by an articulate ideal of self-fulfillment, Bilderdijk conscientiously and conventionally dedicated his life to poetry and learning. In brief, while many aspects of Bilderdijk’s oeuvre may seem to point to Romanticism, the overall picture intimated by his life and thought is not convincingly “Romantic”.

The same applies to his theosophical leanings. Bilderdijk only answers in part to recent definitions of Western “esotericism” – a current of thought now perceived to be associated as much with Enlightenment as with Romanticism. Antoine Faivre, who pioneered the study of early modern esotericism, has stressed the combination of four elements in esoteric thought: a belief in correspondences, the idea of living nature, an emphasis on the imagination, and the experience of transmutation as a mystical path of regeneration.⁶⁴ Correspondences figure largely in Bilderdijk’s thought, but he spurned the imagination, had no regard for nature as a living entity, and held views on regeneration that resembled evangelical pietism more than they did the esoteric quest for *gnosis*. Although he evidently drew on the popular esotericism extant in the Germany he simultaneously despised as a hotbed of secret societies and *Aufklärung*, “theosophy” as such is only one of several strands in Bilderdijk’s thought.

To call Bilderdijk a Romantic would be to overinflate the concept of Romanticism, and to qualify him as an esoteric *tout court* would be to ignore the complexity of his thought. As an eclectic combination of Augustinian, esoteric, and classicist elements, Bilderdijk’s life work was motivated by two fundamental beliefs. The first was an adamant anti-skepticism inspired by Christian theosophy, the second a millenarianism prompted by orthodox biblicism as well as a humanistic and emphatically exoteric concern to advance knowledge. Such traits are characteristic of Popkin’s Third Force

thinkers. Moreover, Bilderdijk's thought was itself oriented towards the seventeenth century – politically towards theorists of the feudal monarchy, poetically towards French classicists, religiously towards Pascal, and theosophically towards Leibniz and Van Helmont. Bilderdijk testifies to the longevity of the Third Force, as an anti-skeptic and millenarian counter-culture that flowered in the seventeenth century and was aimed at preserving the relations between natural philosophy, cosmology, humanist learning, and exoteric religion. But he also testifies to the decline of this tradition. As the rise of modern esotericism illustrates, the Third Force synthesis desintegrated in the nineteenth century. It was Bilderdijk's tragedy as a creative thinker that his obstinate appeal to a waning tradition has never quite been understood. He lived on the threshold of the modern world, which, as a vestige of the Third Force, he obstinately refused to cross.

¹ The research for this paper was made possible by a grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers of this Journal for their helpful comments.

² “Epistle to Allan Cunningham,” *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (Paris, [1850]), 724-27.

³ Abraham Kuyper, the social and intellectual leader of nineteenth-century Dutch neo-Calvinism, made a major statement in this tradition; see his *Bilderdijk in zijne nationaale betekenis* (Amsterdam, Pretoria [1906]). In the same vein is Walter Lagerwey, *Bilderdijk and the German Enlightenment*, diss. University of Michigan, 1958.

⁴ An English text in this tradition is Nicolaas A. Rupke’s “Romanticism in the Netherlands,” *Romanticism in National Context*, eds. R. Porter and M. Teich (Cambridge, 1988), 191-216.

⁵ Cornelis de Deugd, “Friendship and Romanticism: Robert Southey and Willem Bilderdijk,” *Europa Provincia Mundi. Essays in Comparative Literature and European Studies*, eds. J. Leerdam and K.U. Syndram (Amsterdam, Atlanta, 1992), 369-88, here 375.

⁶ E.g. Jan Th.W. Oosterholt, *De ware dichter. De vaderlandse poëtische discussie in de periode 1775-1825* (Amsterdam, 1998).

⁷ Richard H. Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992), espec. 90-119.

⁸ Quoted in C. Soeteman, “Willem Bilderdijk und Jakob Grimm,” *Palaeogermanica et onomastica*, ed. A. Quack and F. van der Rhee (Amsterdam, 1989), 229-42, here 241.

⁹ He also made this abundantly clear to Southey, who in his poem continued: “A man he is / Who hath received upon his constant breast / The sharpest arrows of adversity. / Whom not the clamours of the multitude, / Demanding, in their madness and their might, / Iniquitous things, could shake in his firm mind.”

¹⁰ For a recent appreciation, see Johan van der Zande, “In the Image of Cicero: German Philosophy between Wolff and Kant,” in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995), 419-42.

¹¹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature* (Baltimore, 1961), 129-51.

¹² See also Johan van der Zande, “The Moderate Skepticism of German Popular Philosophy,” *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1800. Skepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society*, ed. Johan van der Zande and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1998), 69-80.

¹³ Bilderdijk almost certainly read *Du commerce établi entre l’âme et le corps* (1785) in this period, as well as other (unspecified) works by Swedenborg. In later years he also read the popular *De coelo et ejus mirabilibus, et*

de inferno ex auditis et visis (1758) and *Delitiae sapientiae de amore conjugali* (1768). During the 1820s, Bilderdijk befriended C.P.H.M.W. friherre Dirckinck-Holmfeld (1799-1880), a Danish Swedenborgian.

¹⁴ Still later in life, in the 1820s, Bilderdijk avidly read the *Blätter für höhere Wahrheit*, a journal edited by the German theosophist and freemason J.F. von Meyer (1772-1849). See Jacques Fabry, *Le théosophe de Francfort. Johann Friedrich von Meyer et l'ésotérisme en Allemagne au XIXe siècle* (Bern etc., n.d.)

¹⁵ Cf. MS Bilderdijk Museum, Amsterdam, sign. A-66. Bilderdijk was especially wary of the dominant influence of Saturn which cropped up regularly in cycles of seven years, predicting disasters in 1811 and 1819, and his own death in 1825.

¹⁶ D.G. Hoffmann, *Hermann Daniel Hermes. Der Günstling Wöllners (1731-1807)* (Breslau, 1914); Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, 1975), 104-11, 352-69.

¹⁷ Douglas Brooks-Davies, *The Mercurian Monarch. Magical Politics from Spenser to Pope* (Manchester, 1983), 197.

¹⁸ Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme – théosophie 1770-1820* (1927; reprint: Paris, 1979) vol. I, 136; Antoine Faivre, “J.C. Lavater, Charles de Hesse, et l'école du Nord,” *Mystiques, théosophes et illuminés au siècle des lumières* (Hildesheim, New York, 1976), 175-90.

¹⁹ Van Goens was a man of letters whose precociousness and erudition have been matched in the Netherlands only by Hugo Grotius. He was a correspondent of many major writers of his time, including Cesarotti, Wieland, Klotz and Gessner, and later became a close friend of Lavater.

²⁰ Michiel R. Wielema, “Die erste niederländische Kant-Rezeption 1786-1850,” in: *Kant-Studien* 79 (1988), 450-66.

²¹ Apparently a common view among German thinkers. Bilderdijk probably derived his view from J.J. Eschenburg's account in *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Kollektaneen zur Literatur*, under “Religion, christliche”; see Lessing, *Werke*, ed. H. Göpfert (München, 1970-1979), vol. 8, 677-78.

²² *Mr. W. Bilderdijk's briefwisseling 1795-1797*, eds. Jan Bosch, H.W. Groenevelt, and Marinus van Hattum, (Utrecht, 1988), 418 (letter to Maria P. Elter-Woesthoven, 1797); for Bilderdijk's views on Kant, see his letters to the Kantian Johannes Kinker in *Johannes Kinker (1764-1845). Briefwisseling*, eds. André J. Hanou and George J. Vis, vol. I (Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1992), 118-19.

²³ For a similar anti-Kantian position, see Antoine Faivre, “Un théosophe post-kantien: Thomas Lechleitner (1740-1797),” *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 174 (1968), 39-63; for Bilderdijk's rejection of German

Idealism, see Joris van Eijnatten, *Hogere sferen. De ideeënwereld van Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831)* (Hilversum, 1998), Chapter 8.

²⁴ E.g. his essay “Over de oorzakelijkheid” (On Causality), *Verhandelingen, ziel-, zede-, en rechtsleer betreffende* (Leiden, 1821), 119-38.

²⁵ “Over dichterlijke geestdrift en dweepery” (On Poetic Inspiration and Enthusiasm, 1809), *Taal- en dichtkundige verscheidenheden* (Rotterdam, 1820-1823), vol. I, 1-52.

²⁶ “Venatio scientiarum,” *Opera omnia* (Frankfurt, 1682), 22-24; W. Pagel, *Joan Baptista Van Helmont. Reformer of Science and Medicine* (Cambridge, 1982), 21-34.

²⁷ E.g. “Van het menschlijk verstand” (On the Human Understanding), *Verhandelingen*, 141-86.

²⁸ Bilderdijk’s main statement is a didactic poem “De kunst der poëzy” (The Art of Poetry, 1809), reissued by Wim van den Berg and Joost J. Kloek (Amsterdam, 1995).

²⁹ Bilderdijk was a fervent writer of rather ambiguous wedding poetry that often embarrassed his contemporaries. For the background to his ideas, cf. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel. Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, 1993); *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. VII, col. 1408, on “Worship Through Corporeality (Arodah be-Gashmiyyut)”; Paul Kluckhohn, *De Auffassung der Liebe in der Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts und in der deutschen Romantik* (1922; reprint: Tübingen, 1966).

³⁰ “Het buitenleven” (Life in the Country, 1803), *De dichtwerken van Bilderdijk*, ed. Isaac da Costa (15 vols.; Haarlem 1856-1859), vol. VI, 480.

³¹ Van Eijnatten, *Hogere sferen*, 358.

³² Jan Noordegraaf, “From Greek to Dutch. The Schola Hemsterhusiana and the Study of the Mother Tongue. A Few Remarks,” *Linguistics in the Low Countries: The Eighteenth Century*, eds. Ronald de Bonth and Jan Noordegraaf, (Münster, 1996), 33-56.

³³ Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology. Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1972).

³⁴ M. Baldi, “Andrew Michael Ramsay. Ciclita è progresso nell’antica teologia alle soglie dell’illuminismo,” *Rivista di storia della filosofia* (1989), 443-76; and *idem*, “Confutazione di Spinoza e pirronismo. La via al senso comune di A.M. Ramsay,” *Rivista di storia della filosofia* (1994), 215-61. Popkin, “Third Force,” 91-2, includes Ramsay in the Third Force tradition

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- ³⁵ Plato, *Charmides*, 158b; Bilderdijk, *Kort verhaal van eene aanmerkelijke luchtreis, en nieuwe planeetontdekking. Uit het Russisch vertaald*, ed. Piet E.L. Verkuyl (Groningen, 1995) 34-35.
- ³⁶ See also the didactic poems “Schilderkunst” (The Art of Painting, 1811) and “Zucht naar ’t Vaderland” (Longing for the Fatherland, 1814), *De dichtwerken van Bilderdijk*, vol. VII, 94-106 and 157-71.
- ³⁷ Cf. Bilderdijk, *Geschiedenis des Vaderlands*, ed. Hendrik W. Tydeman (13 vols.; Amsterdam, 1832-1855), vol. I, 20, 233-34.
- ³⁸ *Mr. W. Bilderdijk’s briefwisseling 1795-1797*, 315 (letter to Maria P. Elter-Woesthoven, 1797). Bilderdijk’s opinion of Germans was especially low. He also believed that the degeneration of the European race had been greatly increased through American influence, in particular the introduction of syphilis and the potato.
- ³⁹ “Afscheid” (Farewell, 1811), *De dichtwerken van Bilderdijk*, vol. IV, 105-18.
- ⁴⁰ Annotation in Bilderdijk, “Over de Sebastianisten in Portugal,” *Algemeene Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* 32 (1810) 2e stuk, 634-44; this essay is a translation of José Agostinho de Macedo’s *Os Sebastianistas* (Lisbon, 1810).
- ⁴¹ “’s Konings komst tot den thron” (The Enthronement of the King, 1809), *De dichtwerken van Bilderdijk*, vol. IX, 66-81.
- ⁴² *Brieven van mr. Willem Bilderdijk* (5 vols.; Amsterdam, 1836-1837), vol. V, 17-20 (letter to Abraham Capadose, 1822).
- ⁴³ Frank R. Ankersmit, “Bilderdijks conceptie van de historische tijd. De *Monadologie* als model,” *Romantiek en historische cultuur*, ed. Jo Tollebeek et al. (Groningen, 1996), 65-80.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. the essays in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, eds. Allison P. Coudert, Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1998); Susanne Edel, *Die individuelle Substanz bei Böhme und Leibniz. Die Kabbala als Tertium Comparationis für eine Rezeptionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Stuttgart, 1995).
- ⁴⁵ E.g. *Brieven van mr. Willem Bilderdijk*, vol. III, 185 (letter to Samuel I. Wiselius, 1820).
- ⁴⁶ *Mr. W. Bilderdijk’s briefwisseling 1795-1797*, 272-3 (letter to Katharina W. Schweickhardt); Bilderdijk’s original English has been retained.
- ⁴⁷ On Brothers and his associates, see John F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming. Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), 64-66.
- ⁴⁸ Herman Bavinck, writing in the neo-Calvinist tradition, suggested that this principle was the idea of unity itself; see his *Bilderdijk als denker en dichter* (Kampen, 1906).

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- ⁴⁹ Donald Greene, "Augustinianism and Empiricism. A Note on Eighteenth-Century English Intellectual History," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* I (1967-1968), 33-68; Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, 1981).
- ⁵⁰ For the background to Bilderdijk's interpretation of the adage, see Alexander Altmann, "The Delphic Maxim in Medieval Islam and Judaism," *idem, Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (London, 1969), 1-40.
- ⁵¹ Andreas Kinneging, *Aristocracy, Antiquity, and History. An Essay on Classicism in Political Thought* (The Hague, 1994).
- ⁵² The following is based on Kinneging, *Aristocracy, Antiquity, and History*, 26-8 and 139-63.
- ⁵³ Cf. Gustav A. Krieg, *Der mystische Kreis. Wesen und Werden der Theologie Pierre Poirets* (Göttingen, 1997), 136, who uses the term "ontological periphery" to designate man's status in the order of being.
- ⁵⁴ MS University of Leiden Ltk 1099, pp. 2v-3r.
- ⁵⁵ Bilderdijk, *Geschiedenis des vaderlands*, vol. I, 100.
- ⁵⁶ R.C. Tennant, "The Anglican Response to Locke's Theory of Personal Identity," in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43 (1982), 73-90.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. H. Moulinié, *De Bonald. La vie – la carrière politique – la doctrine* (Paris, 1916). In the 1820s Bilderdijk read with approval a number of books by the conservative Catholic Joseph de Maistre (who in his youth had also shown a keen interest in theosophy).
- ⁵⁸ A recent balanced discussion of Hutchinsonianism is B.W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England. Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), 136-57. Bilderdijk had read the anti-Newtonian work of William Jones, one of the Hutchinsonians, but also made good use of French writings; on this background, see F.H. van Lunteren, *Framing Hypotheses. Conceptions of Gravity in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Utrecht, 1991).
- ⁵⁹ Geoffrey N. Cantor, *Optics after Newton. Theories of Light in Britain and Ireland, 1704-1840* (Manchester, 1983).
- ⁶⁰ For this combination, see Martin Mulsow, "Vernünftige Metempsychosis. Über Monadenlehre, Esoterik und geheime Aufklärungsgesellschaften im 18. Jahrhundert", *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk (Hamburg, 1999).
- ⁶¹ Cf. H. Friedrich, "Die Sprachtheorie der französischen Illuminaten des 18. Jahrhunderts, insbesondere Saint-Martins," *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 13 (1935), 293-310.

⁶² Gert-Jan Johannes, *Gedachte verbeeldingskracht! Een onderzoek naar het literaire denken over de verbeelding – van Van Alphen tot Verwey* (Amsterdam, 1992).

⁶³ Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790). *Quellen, Philosophie und Rezeption*, ed. M.F. Fresco et al (Münster, 1995).

⁶⁴ Faivre's views are discussed in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture. Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden, 1996); Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, "Einleitung," *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, 1-37.